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HEALTH & SAFETY
NEWSLETTER

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Your best bone health

If you're younger than 50 you probably rarely give osteoporosis a second thought. After all, that's an old person's disease isn't it? But the choices you make when you're younger can make the difference between having healthy bones when you're older or suffering from repeat fractures.

Fragile, weak bones that fracture easily are a hallmark of the disease osteoporosis, a condition that can have devastating consequences on your independence and even life expectancy. According to Osteoporosis International, osteoporosis causes more than 8.9 million fractures annually worldwide, resulting in an osteoporotic fracture every 3 seconds.

Until your mid-twenties your body makes new bone faster than it breaks down old bone, so your bone mass increases. This changes from your early-30s onwards. You'll then start to lose slightly more bone mass than you gain, a process that increases once you're over 50. But, whatever your age, there are steps you can take to increase your chance of maintaining healthy bones.

Action plan for strong bones

1. Eat enough calcium-rich foods. If you don't eat enough of the bone-building mineral calcium, your body will 'steal' it from your bones to ensure your blood level remains constant. Milk, cheese and yoghurt are rich in calcium and you should aim for at least three servings a day. If you want a dairy alternative, make sure you choose one that's calcium fortified. Other calcium-rich foods include broccoli, bok choy, beans, almonds, dried figs and apricots and tinned salmon and sardines (if you eat the soft bones).

2. Get sufficient Vitamin D. Vitamin D is important for calcium absorption. Foods with higher levels of vitamin D include mushrooms (those labelled as high in vitamin D have been exposed to UV light), fish and egg yolks.

Sun exposure also boosts your vitamin D levels, but can also increase your risk of skin cancer. Make sure you stay safe in the sun and protect your skin when UV levels are 3 or above.

3. Limit caffeine. A high intake of caffeine from tea, coffee and cola can reduce calcium absorption, so don't have more than three caffeinated drinks per day.

4. Use your body weight. Weight-bearing exercise – exercise done while on your feet and supporting your skeleton – is key to good bone health. If you love walking, make sure it's fast paced, as sedate and slow walking may not be as protective of bone. Strength training using weights of some kind also benefits your bones, whether it's using gym machines, dumbbells or your own body weight. ✕



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10 September is World Suicide Prevention Day.

Every year, suicide is among the top 20 leading causes of death globally for people of all ages. It is responsible for over 800,000 deaths, which equates to one suicide every 40 seconds. For each suicide approximately 135 people suffer intense grief or are otherwise affected. This amounts to 108 million people per year who are profoundly impacted by suicidal behaviour. Visit www.iasp.info/wspd2020 for more information.

Sleep, interrupted



You know when you feel sleepy. You may even describe yourself as tired all the time. But regular sleepiness can tip over into something far more dangerous if you have a condition called obstructive sleep apnoea.

We all have the occasional poor night's sleep, waking up feeling sluggish and tired. During the day we may lack energy, find it hard to concentrate or notice a low mood. But people who have obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) can experience these feelings every day.

Nearly one billion people globally have OSA, making it one of the most common sleep disorders. The health and financial costs are high. According to Australia's Sleep Health Foundation, OSA not only disturbs your sleep, it's a stress on your body.

There is strong evidence that people with untreated moderate to severe OSA have other health problems, says the Sleep Health Foundation. These include increased risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and depression. Thinking is less clear, mood is affected, and

productivity at work and at home suffer. OSA also increases the risk of motor vehicle and workplace accidents by six to seven times.

With a recent study in the *Lancet* estimating almost one billion people are affected by sleep apnoea, it is not hard to imagine that the financial costs associated with this are high, including health care costs, lost productivity and other financial impacts.

What is OSA?

OSA is more than just bad snoring. If you have OSA the walls of your throat relax and narrow during sleep, interrupting normal breathing. Your airway can partially or completely close, which means your breathing often stops for a short time, even for up to a minute. You'll wake for a few seconds to open your airway, perhaps snort and gasp, then drift back to sleep again, often without realising you've woken up. This can happen hundreds of times a night. OSA is classified as mild, moderate or severe depending on how many times your sleep is interrupted during an hour.

What are the signs of OSA?

Loud snoring is a very common symptom of OSA (so loud your bed partner might

complain that it's intolerable), as is waking during the night choking or gasping for air. You may wake in the morning feeling unrefreshed, experience morning headaches, a dry mouth or a sore throat. Daytime tiredness is common, as is difficulty concentrating, and you may notice your work quality suffering as you experience reduced alertness.

Your mood can be affected when you have OSA – it's common to feel more irritable, depressed and anxious after unrefreshing sleep, and to lose your sex drive. Rapid weight gain or difficulty losing weight can also result from untreated OSA. But these symptoms can come and go, and many people remain unaware that they have the condition, or don't realise that it is serious.

Who gets OSA?

While OSA mainly affects men, women can have it too, particularly after menopause. OSA was reportedly a contributing factor behind the death of actress Carrie Fisher in 2016. Sleep apnoea can even affect children.

Aside from being male, there are other factors that increase your risk, including:

- Being overweight, in particular having



excess fatty tissue around the neck, which can cause a narrowing of the throat. However OSA can also occur in people who aren't overweight.

- Having a large neck circumference (>43cm for men; >40cm for women).
- Being middle aged and older.
- Smoking – smokers are three times more likely to have sleep apnoea than non-smokers.
- Excess alcohol consumption, particularly at night. Alcohol can relax the muscles in your throat, closing the upper airway. Sleeping pills can have a similar effect.

First, get a diagnosis

Don't attempt to self-diagnose sleep apnoea. First see your doctor, who can refer you to a sleep specialist if necessary, who may recommend a sleep study. That way you'll find out if you have sleep apnoea, whether it's mild, moderate or severe, and what treatment would be most appropriate for you.

What you can do to reduce your risk

According to the Sleep Health Foundation, for people with a mild level of OSA and few

symptoms, losing weight, decreasing the amount of alcohol consumed in the evening and adjusting their sleeping position may be all that is needed. (Most people have more OSA episodes if they sleep on their backs).

Of course, losing weight is easier said than done. But losing just 10 per cent of your body weight can have a big effect on sleep apnoea symptoms. Ask your doctor for a referral to a dietitian who can help make achievable adjustments to your diet and physical activity to aid weight loss.

A simple solution to help you sleep on your side that you can do yourself is to place a tennis ball into a pocket sewn onto the back of your pyjamas, making it uncomfortable to sleep on your back. You can buy more sophisticated versions of this – chest belts with back pockets that hold inflatable bumpers, or electronic devices that buzz or vibrate when you lie on your back.

If you have moderate or severe sleep apnoea, other treatment may be needed in addition to weight loss. These include:

1. CPAP. The first line treatment for OSA is continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). This is where the patient wears a mask

and sufficient air is blown into the mask to prevent airway closure during sleep. CPAP is highly effective in reducing sleep-related breathing disturbances and millions of people worldwide have had their lives changed by CPAP therapy.

2. Dental appliances. For some people an oral appliance (mandibular advancement device) fitted by a specialist dentist can hold the jaw forward during the night, helping to keep the airway open.

3. Drug therapy. Researchers at the Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health at Flinders University are trialling new drug therapies which aims to open up the airways and improve sufferers' sleep.

Director Professor Danny Eckert says that a range of issues means OSA is often untreated. "New treatments are urgently needed," he says, "and we're aiming to use and develop novel approaches to identify the causes of OSA on a per patient basis, improve current therapies and management approaches and test if new targeted therapies can be used to treat OSA." ✕

3 myths about anxiety



Despite it being the most common mental health condition in the world, anxiety is often misunderstood, with many of us still holding damaging attitudes towards it.

Your body works hard to keep you safe. One way it does this is through anxiety — by stopping you going too near the cliff edge, or getting you to see a doctor if you're feeling unwell.

But as psychiatrist Mark Cross, author of the book *Anxiety*, explains: "When anxiety is intense, enduring and causing the kind of panic that interferes with a person's life so they can't function well, then it may be that they are suffering from an anxiety disorder and need professional help."

Unfortunately, anxiety remains a misunderstood condition, which can lead to stigma and discrimination for people who experience it.

"A quarter of us will experience anxiety at some point, so it is concerning that roughly half of us still have either misconceptions or are unaware of the condition, its symptoms and available treatment," says Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman.

Here are three common misconceptions about anxiety:

1. It's not a real medical condition

We all get anxious, but for most of us it's fleeting, and the feelings pass once the stressor disappears.

Part of the problem, says Ceris Lane, a speaker with SANE Australia, is that because most people have experienced anxiety at

some level, we tend to minimise it.

As she describes in the book *Anxiety*: "If I try to explain the debilitating anxiety that I experience, I feel sure that people will roll their eyes and think, 'We all get anxious sometimes, get over it.'" But anxiety is a real medical condition. On top of the distressing psychological symptoms, anxiety can cause stomach problems, dizziness, chills, increased heartbeat, chest pain, trouble breathing, headaches, muscle tension, and insomnia.

2. People with anxiety bring it on themselves, or can 'snap out of it'

There isn't an on and off button for anxiety, says Beyond Blue. Many people still believe that people dealing with anxiety should be able to just switch it off, or 'calm down'.

Mark Cross, who suffers from anxiety himself, has experienced this attitude firsthand: "The person [with anxiety] may seem so calm that others doubt the veracity of their distress," he says. "Because there are often no tangible symptoms, there's a common perception that people somehow bring anxiety on themselves, that perhaps they have maladjusted temperaments, or lack willpower.

"These views ignore the evidence that people suffering anxiety don't choose to be in that situation," he explains, "and that it

takes a massive personal effort to maintain clear thinking and acting."

3. Anxiety is a sign of personal weakness

Having anxiety does not mean you are weak or inferior. Anxiety, like other mental health conditions, affects people of all ages and all walks of life. Any perception that it is a weakness must change, says Beyond Blue, as this stigma means people dealing with anxiety are less likely to seek support. ✕

Online help for anxiety

Your doctor or psychologist can help you with your anxiety. You can also get support from online services.

anxietycentre.com – a hub for information, links and assistance with anxiety issues.

myCompass.org.au – a free self-help program for people with anxiety, depression and stress.

ecouch.anu.edu.au – free anonymous web-based, self-help modules for anxiety, social anxiety and stress-related life events.

Learn more about anxiety and take the anxiety checklist here: beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety

How to stop stress affecting your health



Worrying about your health. Concern over your job and finances. Anxiety for your children. Stress can impact your entire body, so learn some quick ways to reduce it.

Would you know if you were stressed? It sounds a simple enough question. You'd feel it wouldn't you? Worry, anger, anxiety – these are some of the more familiar signs of stress. But stress can also affect your body in more surprising ways, thanks to your body's stress hormones.

Whatever the cause of stress, everyone responds in a similar way, a way we've done for thousands of years, explains Kate Harkness, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry and Director of the Mood Research Laboratory, Queen's University, Ontario.

When animals or humans perceive a threat in their environment the adrenal glands release the hormone cortisol and adrenaline, she says. These work to pump oxygen to the major muscles to enable us to fight or escape the perceived danger (the 'fight or flight' response). This response produces physical symptoms such as heart palpitations and chest tightness, as the heart pumps oxygen to the muscles; and stomach butterflies, nausea and tingling, as blood leaves the stomach and extremities to reach the major muscles.

Your body doesn't know the difference between immediate, life-threatening stress, and the slow-burn type of stress we more commonly experience. All it knows is that it needs to release stress hormones because your body is sensing a threat in your environment.

Your body on stress

Cortisol is a potent anti-inflammatory that helps repair wounds and fight infection – useful if you've been in a situation that caused injury. But in the long term the cells in your immune system becomes less sensitive to the anti-inflammatory effects of cortisol, and as a result, explains Professor Harkness, all that extra cortisol can start to increase inflammation and affect your immune system. That's why you're more likely to pick up infections and viruses after a long period of stress.

Stress can impact your body in other ways too. Without taking steps to reduce or relieve your stress, you can experience:

- Headaches
- Muscle aches and pains
- Fatigue and insomnia
- Digestive problems
- High blood pressure
- High blood sugar
- Weight gain, mostly around the midsection and upper back
- Memory and concentration difficulties

As important as the stress response is when we are in a threatening situation, it's just as important that we learn ways to lower it when we're faced with everyday problems. ✕

3 ways to lower stress hormones

Even small, positive changes can have strong stress-reducing effects, says Professor Harkness.

- **Get active.** Exercise reduces levels of the body's stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, as well as stimulating the production of mood elevating endorphins. Choose a leisurely walk, yoga session, a run, swim, or play a sport.
- **Breathe.** Simple breathing exercises can help reduce stress. Breathe in lowly and deeply, hold your breath briefly, and exhale slowly, thinking 'relax'. Repeat the sequence five to 10 times.
- **Laugh.** Researchers have shown that this natural medicine can improve your mood, lower cortisol, strengthen your immune system, relax your muscles, and combat stress. Listen to a funny podcast, watch amusing YouTube videos, have a laugh with friends, or tune into your favourite comedy show.

How to spot an **overuse injury**

You might notice soreness or discomfort at first in your neck, arms, wrist, fingers or shoulder. Then perhaps you develop tingling, or have difficulty doing everyday tasks like opening a jar. These symptoms could indicate Occupational Overuse Syndrome.

Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) is also sometimes called Repetitive Strain Injury or RSI. It is a type of injury common to fingers, hands, wrists and elbows that is caused by repetitive movements or awkward postures.

Repetitive manual tasks such as working on a keyboard, working on an assembly line, or even playing a musical instrument can overwork and inflame vulnerable tendons. Symptoms include pain, weakness, swelling, numbness and restricted mobility of the joint.

We usually associate OOS with repetitive hand movements such as typing, but any part of the body can be affected, including the tendons and muscles of the fingers, hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, back and neck.

Who is most at risk?

Any job that calls for fast and repetitive movements, or one where you have to work in fixed or awkward postures for long periods of time can trigger OOS. People who work with their hands are most at risk, with occupations most affected including:

- Office workers – including anyone who uses a keyboard and those doing clerical duties
- Process workers – working on an assembly line and packing
- Piece workers – such as people working in the clothing industry
- Manual workers – such as bricklayers and carpenters

Performing repetitive manual tasks will put stress on your body. But so too will poor workplace design and poor work practices, such as furniture, tools or equipment that aren't comfortable for you; benches or workstations that are too high, too low, or too far from your body; machinery that is too fast for user comfort; tight deadlines that mean you don't take sufficient breaks; and a workspace design that means you have to repeatedly bend, stretch or twist.

Don't ignore OOS

Your OOS will not go away by itself. Over time the discomfort and pain are likely to get worse without treatment. See your doctor for treatment, advice and a referral to an appropriate specialist. Also tell your manager, as there may be adjustments you can make to your workplace, such as using ergonomically designed furniture and equipment, varying your work tasks, and scheduling work to include frequent breaks. ✕



Ask an expert about ...

Q What is thunderstorm asthma, and am I at risk?

The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy replies:

If you have allergic rhinitis (hay fever) or asthma triggered by pollen, rain from thunderstorms may make your symptoms worse.

Thunderstorm asthma is triggered by a combination of grass pollen in the air and certain thunderstorm conditions that cause large loads of small pollen allergen particles to be released into the air with fast changes in wind, temperature and humidity.

When it rains or is humid, pollen grains can absorb moisture and burst open, releasing hundreds of small pollen allergen particles that can enter the small airways of the lungs.

But it's important to know that

- Not all thunderstorms trigger thunderstorm asthma, even on days with high pollen counts, as other weather factors are involved in thunderstorm asthma.
- It's not only people with pollen allergy who may be affected by thunderstorm asthma.

- Large humidity and temperature changes over a short period of time can affect some people with asthma and other respiratory diseases during a thunderstorm.

If you have allergic rhinitis and a thunderstorm is forecast, try to stay inside on high pollen days. If you have asthma, see your doctor for an asthma management plan and make sure you use your preventer medication every day, particularly if high pollen counts or thunderstorms are predicted. ✕

App of the month

Fitbit

Not just for those that have a Fitbit device, the Fitbit app can let you use your phone as a step counter instead.

It can track your exercise, lets you share your exercise successes with friends on the platform and allows you to log food and track your weight.

It also has a range of free workouts and mindfulness sessions available.

Available free from [Google Play](#) or the [App Store](#).

Is it a cold or an allergy?

Feeling tired? Sneezing? Constantly blowing your nose? You could have a cold, caused by a virus. But then again, you might be experiencing an allergic response to an environmental irritant such as pollen or dust, particularly common at this time of year as we move into hay fever season. How can you tell the difference?

There are some key differences. The first is the colour of your nasal discharge, which is more likely to be yellowish/green if you have a cold, clear if you have hay fever. Itchy eyes or throat are other symptoms typically only seen with an allergy such as hay fever, while a sore throat generally precedes a cold.

One final clue is the time of year and/or length of symptoms. If you notice you always have a 'cold' in spring that lasts for a couple of months, then it's likely to be an allergy to seasonal pollen.



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Suite 3.06, 55 Miller Street Pyrmont NSW 2009 Australia
ACN 624 842 351 **Phone:** 1300 90 10 90

Website: www.healthworks.com.au

Editorial Team:

Editor: Jenny BOSS MHumNutr

Subscriptions: Janelle Gibb

Email: well@healthworks.com.au

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News Bites



The downsides of binge-watching

Thanks to streaming services such as Netflix, it's easy (and tempting) to binge-watch your favourite TV shows. It's a simple way to feel good and allows you to forget your everyday problems for a while. But a growing body of evidence suggests that it may not be the ideal way to consume this form of media. Researchers have linked binge-watching to poorer sleep quality, while University of Melbourne researchers showed that watching shows this way might make them less memorable and less enjoyable than watching them on a weekly basis like we used to on regular free-to-air TV.

The solution? You could restrict yourself to no more than two episodes a night. Or try a bedtime alarm that forces you to tear yourself away from the screen. It also ensures you don't miss out on valuable sleep. ✕

Make your bananas last

It may be delicious, but there's only so much banana bread you can make with those blackened bananas in your fruit bowl. Bananas can get very ripe, very quickly, particularly if the weather is warm. To make the most of bananas, buy them while they are still green and store them correctly:

- Wrap the banana stems in foil to stop them releasing ethylene gas, which accelerates the ripening process.
- Hang the bananas from a banana hook, to prevent bruising and allow oxygen to flow around the bananas.
- Keep them away from other fruits. These include apples, pears, tomatoes and avocados, which also produce ethylene. If you store them together, all these fruits will ripen too quickly.
- If the bananas have gone black, you can mash and freeze them in portions for cooking.

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THING YOU CAN DO TODAY



Plan a hike

We know exercise is good for us – walking, cycling, running, swimming, yoga – whatever your choice, your body will benefit. But there's something especially rejuvenating about being in nature when you exercise.

Hiking, or bushwalking doesn't necessarily mean you have to lace up your hiking boots and trek out for the day with a large backpack. It can mean anything from a short walk through a leafy local park, to a week camping and walking in a national park. Walking amongst nature is so beneficial, say researchers, that some doctors are even starting to prescribe it for their patients.

Dr Qing Li, author of *Forest Bathing: How trees can help you find health and happiness*, maintains that the practice of shinrin-yoku – literally, 'forest bath' in Japanese – has immune boosting benefits, can lower blood pressure, aid sleep and may combat mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and stress.

"It's a preventative medicine, not a treatment," he told the *Observer*. In a time when we increasingly live our lives indoors, he says, connecting to the natural world is something we need to make more of a priority.

Dr Lisa Wood, a public health researcher at the University of Western Australia, agrees, saying that we all have an innate desire to connect to nature. And don't worry if you can't easily access large areas of bushland or forest. Dr Wood and her colleagues found that being in a local park, no matter how small, is also linked to positive mental health.

EAT SMARTER

DIY popcorn

Feeling hungry and wanting a healthy snack? Surprisingly, you could do a lot worse than a small bowl of popcorn.

But we're not talking about the popcorn you might treat yourself to when watching a movie at the cinema. Loaded with salt or sugar, this is rarely a healthy option. Some brands of microwave popcorn you buy from the supermarket are not very good for you either.

What is popcorn?

Popcorn is a type of corn that has a hard shell, containing a starchy interior. When heated, the pressure inside the shell increases and eventually you hear a POP! as the starchy interior explodes outside the shell.

In its 'naked' state, popcorn is an incredibly healthy snack. Even the American Heart Association endorses this whole grain with its high fibre and antioxidant content.

"When prepared well, popcorn actually is a pretty good snack," said Maya Vadiveloo, an assistant professor in the department of nutrition and food sciences at the University of Rhode Island. "It's inexpensive. It's fairly tasty. For people who might be struggling to eat adequate fruits or vegetables or other whole grains, it's a low-risk snack to start."

Air-popping is a good way to prepare popcorn. You can do this easily in a brown paper bag in the microwave, or in a saucepan with a small amount of oil. You then have control over the seasoning you add – a pinch of salt or sugar, cinnamon, chopped nuts or a small amount of butter. ✕



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